

Messenger and Visitor

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Foreign Missions.

The great missionary Conference in New York, which occupied the last ten days of April, will stand forth as a noteworthy event in connection with the history of Christian missions. It was certainly fitting that, at the close of a century marked as no other has been by world-wide evangelistic effort, such a Conference should be held, that representatives of the workers in the great world field might come together to glance at the past and to lift their eyes to the future, to give thanks to God for what the passing century has witnessed of faithful effort in missionary work, and to obtain the girding of power for the great work that lies ahead.

The apparent results of modern missions, it may be freely confessed, have not been all that their promoters hoped for. The Christian world has a much better idea now than it had a century or half a century ago, of what heathenism in its various manifestations really is, and a far better appreciation of the resistance which it is capable of offering to the aggressive forces of Christianity. The young missionary used to go forth with the belief that, if he could only tell the heathen in their own language the story of Calvary, he would see them at once flinging away their idols, renouncing their superstitions, and flocking in scores and in hundreds to the standard of the cross. One does not have to be very old to recall the glowing pictures that used to be painted of what would be accomplished in bringing the heathen world to Christ before the end of the nineteenth century. Our young missionaries of even a quarter of a century ago, as well as those who sent them forth to do battle with the powers of darkness in heathen lands, had but little idea of the strength of the fortifications behind which heathenism lies entrenched. They understood but little of the vice-like grip in which the peoples of India are held by the caste system, of the power of ancient creeds, customs and superstitions over the minds of men, and of that profound spiritual degradation which makes the heathen mind so impotent to conceive the very idea of Christianity.

But if there has been some natural disappointment as to results, some cavil of doubters, and mockings of the enemy, there has been no reason for discouragement or despair on the part of those who have been endeavoring, in the name of their Lord, to fulfil his commission by preaching his gospel in all the world. And there has been no discouragement, no despair, no disposition on the part of Christ's people to withdraw from this work. There will be no turning back, but a pressing forward with larger faith and in greater energy in this mission of causing the world to apprehend the fulness of God's truth and love in Jesus Christ. If the results have not been so large as we hoped for, we must not lose sight of the fact, that there have indeed been great and glorious results of the modern missionary enterprise. At the beginning of the present century, there were in the world about a half dozen Foreign Missionary Societies. There are now some 400 societies, with 15,000 missionaries, 73,000 native helpers, and 1,300,000 communicants, with several millions more who have been brought strongly under the influence of Christianity, and have become more or less imbued with its doctrines. This, some caviller may say, is scarcely more than a drop in the bucket compared with the hundreds of millions of the great heathen world. But it must be considered that the century now closing has but witnessed the inception of this great enterprise. It has been a

time of beginnings, of seed-sowing, and the results are yet to appear. What has been done has not been without result. Already much precious fruit has been reaped, and there are millions of hearts all over heathendom today in which the seed of Christ's truth is germinating. What is there that has been done, in commerce, in empire building, and in all else that men have put their hands to in this century, which, considered as to its influence upon the permanent well-being of the world, is worthy to be compared with what has been done in connection with Christian missions?

It would seem impossible that any Christian can doubt that the great modern missionary movement is of God. In that fact is the assurance that it will go forward. Within a few days we have seen an ex-President of the United States presiding at a meeting of the Ecumenical Conference while the President of that nation and the Governor of the greatest State in the Union delivered addresses, and all felt themselves honored, as well they might, by such connection with the great missionary movement. But the strength of the missionary cause and the assurance of its continuance and triumph lie not in the fact that Presidents and Governors are willing to be its nursing fathers, but in the fact that it is the cause of God and that his people have put their hands to the work in the name and in the strength of Him to whom all power is delivered and who has commissioned them to give his gospel to all nations.

The Sternness and the Tenderness of Love.

In the passage selected from Matthew's gospel for our next Sunday's Bible lesson, we find sentences stern and denunciatory followed by others which are full of tenderness and profoundest sympathy. But they all flow from the lips of truth and are all inspired by divine love. Jesus loves men too well not to tell them the truth about themselves when their highest interests are concerned. And it is necessary for the Christian preacher and the Christian teacher, delivering the message of their Lord to the world, to warn men to flee from the wrath to come, as well as to invite them to come within the shelter of the Everlasting Arms. These are very solemn and stern words which our Lord uttered against those cities of Galilee. In the light of what we have learned of him in this course of lessons, we feel sure that Jesus would not have spoken these words if they had not been true, and if it had not been necessary to utter them as a warning against the fatal mistake of rejecting the Son of God. The ground upon which woe was denounced upon these cities of Galilee, was not that they were more wicked than other cities. As a matter of fact they were probably, in respect to their moral condition, better than most cities of the time. The ground of condemnation was that they repented not. They had beheld many mighty works, and yet had failed to recognize in them the finger of God. They had heard God's truth from the lips of God's Son, and they had not believed. The light had shone into their faces and they had turned away from it, because they loved darkness rather than light. And the ground of condemnation under the gospel is ever the same. If men are not saved it is because they repent not. Men are not lost simply because they are sinners, for God has made provision for saving sinners through his Son. But how can they be saved who shut their ears and harden their hearts against the revelation of God's truth, the pleadings of his love?—It is well for us to recognize that truth and love are eternally united in God. They cannot be separated in Christ. Jesus is not all meekness, gentleness, tenderness. His love could not be a divine, redeeming love, if it were not strong enough to be faithful and true even to sternness. These stern words of Jesus are as true today as they were when he uttered them, and they are as applicable to those of this generation who repent not, as they were to the people of Bethsaida, Chorazin and Capernaum.

The preachers and the teachers of Christian truth in our generation are often troubled because of the unfriendly attitude of men toward Christ and his gospel. There are so many who utterly despise and reject, and there are so many who, while professing the name of Christ, seem to possess so little of his spirit and to know so little of his fellowship. It should help us when we are in danger of being dis-

mayed and discouraged with this condition of things, to remember that it is one which our Lord also had to meet. It troubled his spirit and caused him to utter this terrible arraignment of those who in wilful blindness despised his gospel. But though his spirit was troubled it was not weakened or discouraged because of the impotence and opposition of men. He adores the wisdom of the Infinite Father, which has hidden these things from the wise and prudent and has revealed them unto babes. Doubtless the great truths concerning the relation of humanity to God were clear to Jesus as they are not to us. There is more in these words of his than we can yet fully comprehend. But what is plain is that salvation for men is through Jesus Christ. The consciousness of the divine sonship is clear in him. The Father has committed all things into his hands. The world does not understand, it disbelieves, opposes and rejects the Son of Man. But the Father knows the Son. The world does not know the Father—else it would know the Son also. But the Son knows the Father and reveals him to whom he will,—to the simple-hearted, to all who are willing to be taught of God. Here is the great truth which Paul afterwards learned and preached, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." Men do not come to know the Father except through the Son. The fatherhood of God is clearly revealed only through the sonship of Jesus. Those who come into fellowship with him are thereby brought into fellowship with God as their Father in Heaven.

It is because of the unique relation in which he stands to the Father, and because of the authority which therefore belongs to him, that Jesus Christ is able to cry to all the world of humanity:—"Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." The rest which Jesus offers men does not mean freedom from all labor, endeavor and strife. It means the rest of right relationship. It is such rest as the imprisoned wild bird finds when its cage door is opened, such rest as the fish cast upon the shore finds when returned to its native element, such rest as the rebellious child feels when its evil disposition is overcome and it moves again within the circle of the parent's love. There is a yoke to be borne, but it has been fashioned by a father's hand, there is a service to be rendered, but it is the easy service of love. The rest to which our Lord invites means harmony with God. It means fellowship with the Father and with Jesus Christ his Son.

The War.

The principal events of the week in connection with the war are the relief of Wepener and the retirement of the Boer forces northward and eastward from that part of the Orange Free State. During Tuesday night the Boers evacuated De Wetts Dorp, where their losses are said to have been considerable, and the place was occupied by General Chermiside's division, while Generals French and Rundle set out in pursuit of the retreating enemy. On Wednesday the Boer force which had been investing Wepener for some time withdrew hurriedly, after having made a final fierce but unsuccessful attack upon Colonel Dalgety's force, their retreat being made necessary by the advance of General Brabant's force, which had come in contact with the Boers around Wepener on Tuesday. The Boers have retreated northward and eastward in the direction of Ladysmith. Strong hopes were entertained that the forces sent by Lord Roberts under General French and other commanders might be successful in cutting off the retreat of some bodies of the enemy, but these hopes appear not to have been realized, since the despatches now at hand say that General French's force is returning to Bloemfontein. The situation had become such that the Boers could not remain longer in the eastern and middle part of the Free State, but they appear to have gotten safely away and have probably carried off a large amount of stock, grain and other booty as a result of their raid. It is now learned that Colonel Dalgety's force at Wepener numbered 1,700. His loss during the time that he was surrounded by the Boers was 30 killed and 149 wounded. A sharp battle occurred on Thursday at Israel's Poort, about seven miles west of Thaba N'Chu, in which the Canadian Rifles were prominently engaged, and in which, as on previous occasions, they gave a good account of themselves, driving the Boers from a strongly held position in a line of kopjes. Colonel Otter, who commands the regiment, received

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